

GHOST COUSINS

ZINE



An UNDERTALE Fanzine

PREFACE

hey!

im mars, the official founder of the ghost cousins zine.
i decided to put this together for some
characters that imo deserve way more attention
and that mean a lot to me and others

this is my first time running a zine or, like, any project at
all and guys im gonna be real it came out pretty cool and it
is of course all because of me and me only (kidding. im
kidding). really though, im incredibly grateful for our 33
lovely contributors and everyone else who showed even a
little bit of interest in the project. it wouldnt exist
without you

of course i want to give a special thank you to
gordon ender and emerson for helping me run this,
you guys are awesome

anyway enough sappiness!
thank you for reading and enjoy the zine

GHOST COUSINS ZINE

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COVER ART

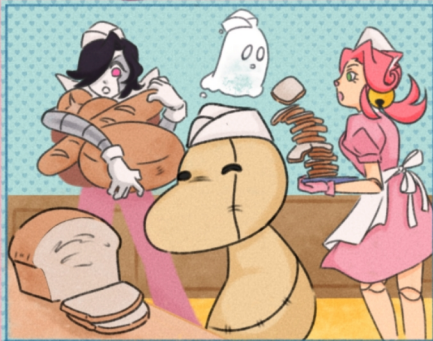
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Would you
Smooch a





Let's Make A Sandwich!



1. Choose your bread



2. Meat of your choice



3. Veggies



4. Condiments and seasoning









MTT

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AS SEEN
ON
TV!

SMOOSH
THE CHEF

*Baking with a
Killer Robot*



* Despite everything,
it's still you.









NEW MEMORIES

Mettaton hesitated in front of his old house. For whatever reason, the door was unlocked even though he was *sure* he'd locked it when he left. He knew Napstablook wouldn't have opened it - they wouldn't even know where the key was. So...Frisk, maybe? He didn't know how they would've found the key, but it was the only one that made sense. Maybe they just saw it lying around somewhere in the dump.

"Hurry up! Hurry up!! HURRY UP!!!!"

Mettaton startled before turning to Mew Mew, frowning. "*Patience*, dear! Surely you can wait a few moments."

Mew Mew's tail lashed briefly as she huffed. "Are you going in or not?"

"Yes, yes. Did you and Blooky get the snacks?" Mettaton asked as he finally turned the knob to his old house and stepped in, not allowing himself to think about it any further.

He could hardly pay attention to Mew Mew's response - something about Napstablook and Ruins Dummy gathering them all in a blanket to carry them easier - as he looked into the house.

He'd forgotten how *pink* it was. It was just how he'd left it, except the diaries almost looked like they'd been moved a little, likely read. That must have been Frisk too, then.

He darted over to his bed and grabbed the blanket on it. That was all he was here for. Maybe some other time he could come back and...relive some memories, perhaps. But now wasn't the time for that.

Blanket secured, he turned to go only to see Mew Mew still there in the doorway, looking around the house. When she saw he was ready to go, though, she quickly turned and left, going over to Blooky's house.

He followed, getting there in time to see Mew Mew gather up the blanket of snacks from Blooky and Ruins Dummy.

"Well? Well?? WELL??? Are we ready to go?"

"Yeah....I guess so....."

“Alright, darlings, let’s go!”

The journey to the statue was mostly filled with silence except for their footsteps in the water. Mettaton couldn’t bring himself to say anything as they walked through Waterfall, too busy looking at all the areas he missed visiting. While he couldn’t say he fully regretted leaving Waterfall, there were many things that he missed. His family was a large part of it, yes, but he also missed the area. Including the statue.

They stopped in front of it, the lanterns they had gotten earlier lighting up the statue in a soft, almost cozy glow. Music was playing from the music box at the base of the statue, softly tinkling. Mettaton couldn’t help himself as he started humming along to it.

He set his blanket down first, taking care to avoid the puddles of water that had accumulated in some areas. Once that was down, he turned to the others as they set the blanket full of snacks down. With the second blanket free, he set that one beside the first one.

Now that everything was set up, they started distributing the ghost snacks. Mettaton accepted a cup of ghost juice from Blooky and took a sip.

It didn’t take long, however, for the sound of the music box to call to him. Leaning against the statue, he started to sing along to the music. For a moment, it was just him, but then Mew Mew began to join in. Slowly, hesitantly, Blooky joined in after, and then so did the Ruins Dummy.

The four of them stood there, Blooky on one side, Mew Mew on the other, and Ruins Dummy in front of Mettaton as they sang. Their ghost sandwiches and drinks had been discarded, forgotten for the moment.

Having all of his family here, nearly all of whom Mettaton had basically abandoned in his search for fame, almost filled him with regret. He was grateful for the opportunities that leaving had granted him, but he did desperately wish that he had made some better choices. Being without his family had left him lonely. Sure, he had Alphys, and while he would always be grateful for everything she had done, she wasn’t one of his cousins.

She didn’t know what it was like to be a ghost, to go most of your life having trouble grasping anything, to be seen as nearly invisible.

Well, maybe she could understand that last one.

But she didn’t know how he’d felt, not truly. He’d tried to explain it to her, once, but he’d never been able to fully succeed. A part of it had been

that he didn't know how to explain it. It was something so tightly ingrained into himself, something he couldn't begin to unravel until he had a body, until he could actually take up space.

He'd never tried again. She understood enough, understood that he'd never felt satisfied as himself, understood that he wanted - *needed* - more.

And the moment he took control of his body for the first time...

He flexed his fingers, something he hadn't always been able to do and took the time to enjoy that it was something he *could* do now.

He looked around at the others around him as they all sang along to the statue's music and could hardly believe he'd once left them.

He looked at Mew Mew. He used to be angry when she left them, but at least she had told them she was going to leave, and it's not like she went very far either.

Ruins dummy...the two had never been very close, admittedly, but he had still been sad to see them go. Blooky would sometimes visit them when they went to the ruins, just to make sure they were doing okay.

And Blooky...

Blooky had never left. They'd been the one to stay, to tend to the snails, to watch as they all left them. Mettaton hoped they'd at least talked to Undyne occasionally.

He looked around to see that the others were watching him and realized that he'd stopped singing. He cleared his throat (and what a wonderful thing it was, that he was able to do that) and picked up the drink he had set down.

"What? I got thirsty." He took a sip, savoring the flavor. For as long as he wasn't fully corporeal, he'd still be able to eat ghost food and drinks, and he intended to make full use of that.

Mew Mew rolled her eyes, turning to her food while Ruins dummy did the same, but Blooky kept their eyes on Mettaton.

They floated a little closer, hovering over his shoulder. "Are you okay...?"

Mettaton smiled up at them, though it didn't quite reach his eyes. "Of course, Blooky. Just...thinking, I suppose."

He ran a finger along the statue, if only because it was something he could do. He wasn't sure he'd ever get over the fact that he could actually *touch* things now, no matter how long it's been. It felt new every time.

He looked at the others. Mew Mew had started humming along to the music while she poured herself another cup of ghost juice. Blooky had floated away a bit, though they hadn't gone far, and Ruins Dummy was focused on their sandwich.

Mettaton knew there was still a lot he'd have to do to fully repair his relationship with them all. He has to prove that he wasn't going to leave again, which he guesses will be much harder than he'd expect. But he'll do it. Whatever it takes.

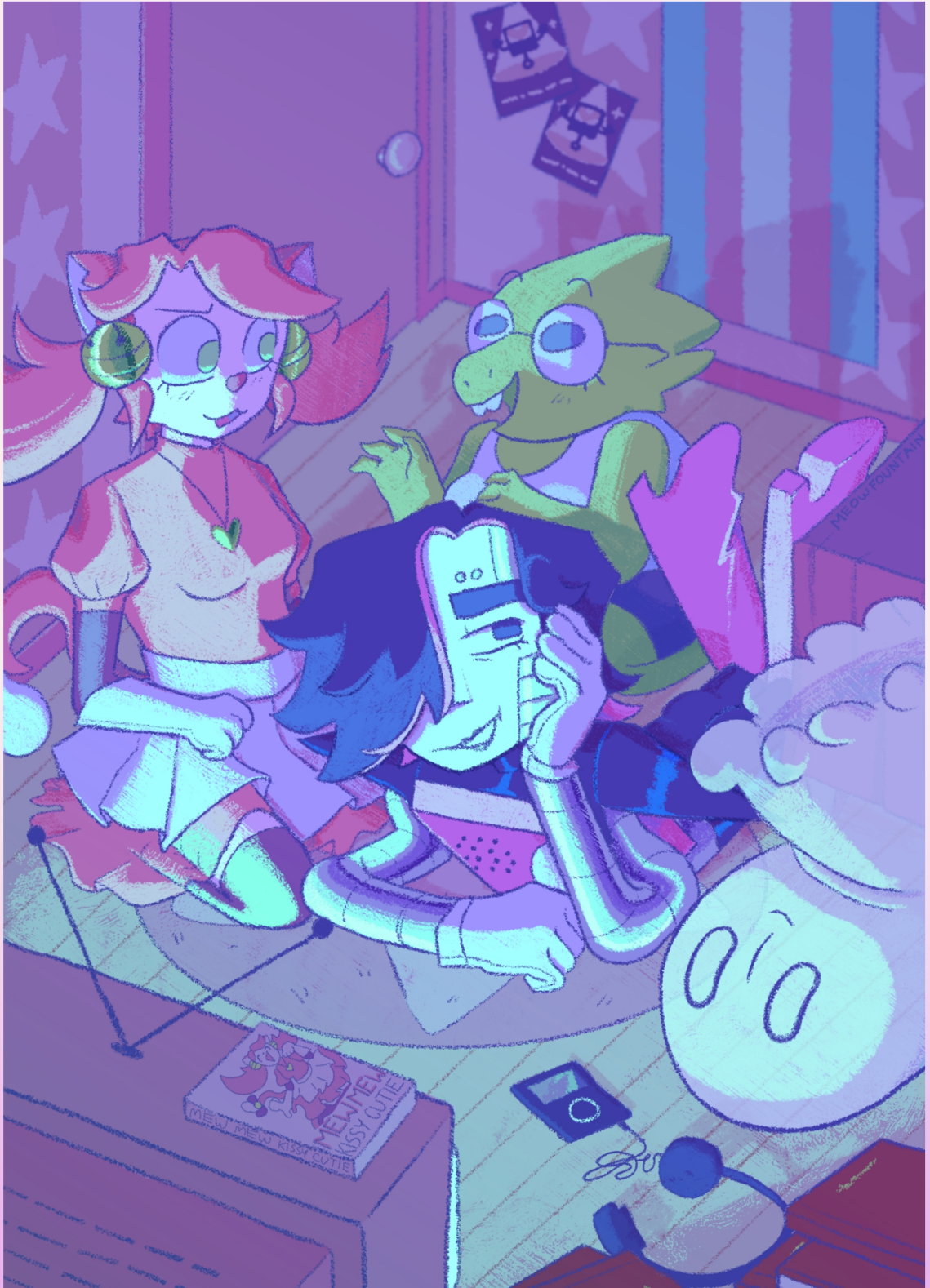
He will not abandon his family again.























PACKING UP, MOVING ON

"It certainly is darker here than I remember. I can barely see my own boots," Mettaton whined, his metallic-tinged voice echoing throughout the twinkling blue-tinged cavern.

"Oh, don't be dramatic, mew," Mew Mew huffed. "You can probably see better than either of us with your fancy high-tech eyeballs."

"Anyway, we're here!" Mettaton completely ignored Mew Mew, swinging around to face both of his cousins with his arms spread wide as if welcoming them to some new attraction. "Time to get packing!!"

"Hmph." Mew Mew flicked her tail. "I'm going to help Blooky first, mew. They have more heavy stuff."

"oh... you don't have to..."

"Really? You're sure you don't have anything?" Mettaton's near-perpetual grin faltered.

Mew Mew shook her head. "Nope. Nothing. You know I'm not the sentimental type. And it's fine, Blooky. That's what I came here for, mew!"

Mettaton let out a barely perceptible sigh. "All right then. I'll be in my place. If you need anything, just give me a holler. I'll be over faster than a snail's slither."

"Right, mew~" Mew Mew gave the robot an enthusiastic salute before marching off to the faded gray lopsided house on the left, Napstablook floating along in her wake after shooting Mettaton a quick guilty glance. Mettaton stayed standing where he was for a moment, trying to decide if Mew Mew had been mocking him or not, before finally facing the inevitable.

It was surreal, coming back here as if nothing had changed. Really, nothing was the same, and it never would be again. It would at least be bittersweet if it didn't still feel like everyone would have been better off if he had never left in the first place.

Turning the slim, star-handled key over in his hands, Mettaton smiled ruefully before finally inserting it into the door of the pink house next to Napstablook's. Napstablook's. It had been quite the shock, Frisk offering the

to him during one of the monsters' first full days on the Surface, just after he was sure all the dust had finally settled. But here he now was. Clearly, some things still needed addressing.

Mettaton barely had time to consider what he wanted to take with him before there was an aggressive knock at the door. He was still smoothing down his silky synthetic hair after being startled out of his reverie when the door swung open, revealing one pink pigtailed cousin.

"We're done, mew~"

"You... Well, that was fast," Mettaton replied, not quite recovered enough to come back with a snarky quip. "Haven't you heard of waiting at the door until someone lets you in?"

Mew Mew rolled her eyes, crossing her arms as she did so. "That's not how Undyne does things."

"Ohhh, right. Because Undyne is the paragon of good manners."

"Hey, shut it! She's more classy than you could ever be, strutting around all the time with your whole metal ass on display!"

Mettaton gasped theatrically, bringing a hand to his chest. "How dare you accuse me of such behavior, darling? Not that there's anything wrong with doing that. But don't hate on a robot simply for indulging in some self-love by showing off!"

"Urgh, you're so obnoxious. Obnoxious! OBNOXIOUS!"

"hey... please don't fight... this is supposed to be a happy time..."

At the sound of that melancholy voice, Mew Mew and Mettaton froze in their places, mere seconds away from launching themselves at each other in a full-on brawl.

Mettaton backed away first, craning his neck around Mew Mew to meet his cousin's anxious gaze. "Oh, Blooky, darling, I'm sorry. We just got a bit carried away."

Mew Mew shot the robot one more resentful glance before turning around to face Napstablook, nodding in agreement. "Right, mew. We're sorry about that, Blooky. Are you sure you got everything you need?"

"yes... it's all out in the yard"

"Great!! Then we just gotta tackle this place and we'll be good to go!"

Mettaton stared at Mew Mew in disbelief. "Are you really not going to treat this with the weight it deserves? This might be the last time we ever visit home. At least take some time to reflect on that."

"Seriously, mew?!" Mew Mew's striking green eyes narrowed and her ears flattened against her head. "Maybe I wasn't the best at keeping in touch, but I'm not the one who just up and left out of nowhere and made us think you were a goner. You have no RIGHT to lecture me like that. Are you really that dense that you don't realize how hypocritical you're being?!"

Mettaton opened his mouth to defend himself, feeling his patience with Mew Mew wearing ever thinner, but one glance at Napstablook's defeated expression dried up any nasty words he might have had to share. He simply sighed, turning back around to survey his neglected room.

"Alright. Anyway, I actually don't have much to get from here either. I took most of my valuables with me to Alphys's place. Maybe I'll just grab my poster. And I need to get these..." Mettaton bent gracefully down to gather his old diaries, layered with dust minus some conspicuous human hand-shaped prints here and there.

Oh, Frisk...

Holding the stack of diaries in his hands, the robot superstar felt a sudden sickening weight drop in his stomach. A weight he was far too familiar with... and one he was too used to repressing. Watching Mew Mew struggle to safely remove his poster from his back wall, with Napstablook hovering anxiously behind her, Mettaton's immediate instinct now was to do the same as he'd become accustomed to doing.

Being vulnerable wasn't exactly his strong suit.

But if not now, when? He might not get this kind of opportunity ever again. If he really wanted to do better, to be better, to move on... He had to do this.

No more excuses.

"I'm sorry."

Mew Mew let out a puff of air as she swung around to face Mettaton, holding the poster triumphantly in her arms above her head. "Got it!" She marched back over to the robot while blowing dust off his poster and

methodically rolling it up to keep it safe. “Did you say something, mew?”

Mettaton systematically avoided meeting her gaze, keeping his eyes trained on the top corner of his room above where Napstablook was currently hovering. “I said I’m sorry.”

“Oh.” Mew Mew finished rolling up the poster. Silence ensued as the three cousins stood, and floated, in place without a word.

“Well, aren’t you going to say something?” Still staring obstinately at that corner, Mettaton felt gentle puffs of steam escaping his face vents as his embarrassment mounted.

“Oh, come on, just give me a minute, mew!” Mew Mew stamped her foot. “I need to think.”

Mettaton felt like shriveling up in that corner and staying there forever, he was so mortified. But just as he had resigned himself to the fact that Mew Mew was probably never going to accept his apology, he heard a rustling from the ghost to her side.

“i forgive you...”

“Huh?” Mettaton’s eyes widened as he met Blooky’s gaze. Just barely, so faintly the robot could hardly tell, they were smiling.

“Blooky...” Mew Mew turned slightly to better face the ghost. “You don’t have to just say that.”

“but... i mean it... i’m sad that you left... but i’m happy you followed your dreams... and i’m happy you came back... that’s all that matters to me...”

Mettaton resisted the urge to burst into a bout of ugly tears.

“Hmm.” Mew Mew shifted her weight to one side before addressing Mettaton. “I mean, I’m sure you know most of why I’m mad at you is because of what you disappearing did to Blooky.”

Mettaton nodded.

“And I’ll probably always think you’re a self-righteous little prick to some extent, mew.”

Mettaton pressed his lips tightly together but nodded again. It wasn't like he wasn't used to hearing this kind of thing from Undyne.

"But if Blooky forgives you... I can't very well not forgive you too." Mew Mew let out a little "heh." "Knowing you, just apologizing was probably pretty hard."

"Well, I—"

"But you're gonna have to prove it, mew!!" Mew Mew cut Mettaton off before he could respond. "We can't just accept whatever you say after you went back on your word before! So don't expect me to just pretend like everything is okay just because you apologized! It's gonna take work on your part, got it, mew?!"

The urge to cry had been mostly replaced by the urge to giggle at Mew Mew's sudden bout of passion as she started pacing, her tail flicking back and forth, poster still in hand. Napstablook drifted backward slightly to give her more room.

"I got it, Maddy."

Mew Mew was right, of course, but there were still so many things left unsaid. Mettaton didn't even know where to start. He would have to get Alphys's advice... After all, his best friend knew a thing or two about the process of atoning for one's sins.

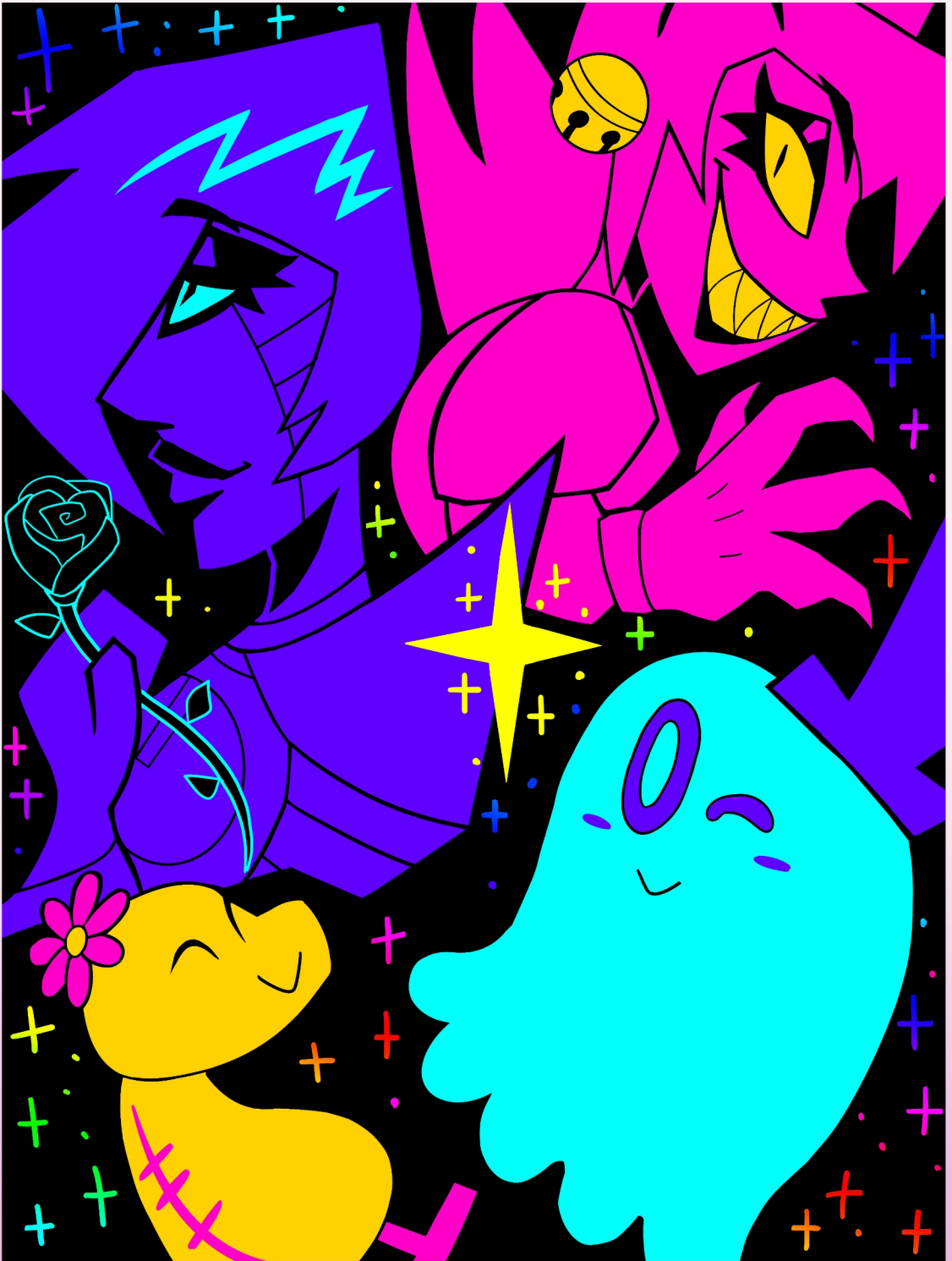
Regardless, Mew Mew stopped in her tracks, nodding decisively. "Good! What do you think, Blooky?"

Without either of their cousins noticing, Napstablook had started silently crying, their tears gently floating upward and congealing into a little pool on the ceiling. "i'm just... so happy... everyone is home, and not fighting..."

Mettaton and Mew Mew both rushed to Napstablook's side, offering words of comfort, but reassured by the fact that these were happy tears on Blooky's part. They even laughed together, almost in disbelief at the fact that this was what had brought them back here again.

It was almost like... They were a family.







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THERE IS AN ABSENCE, HERE

It is not Mettaton's fault that he cannot knock on their front door.

The thing is: he is a very busy robot. Or, he will be, in about two hours. The event he'd scheduled for the morning had fallen through last minute when something urgent came up for the main cameraperson, and her assistant was in no way trained enough to fill in and shoot this particular shot, so now everyone's off for the first half of the day. Which is absolutely, completely fine - what kind of boss would he be to keep one of his staff from dealing with a family emergency, anyway?

So: he has time off. Time off means he is not performing. Time off means he has to do something else, and unfortunately, he'd already made the calls and set the schedules for his future plans within the first two hours of his free time, so.

(Time off means time to think. Time to think means time for his mind to wander.)

(It always wanders home.)

Besides, it would be nice to see Blooky again, the part of him with the fool's courage to try rationalizes, and it is part of why he is now staring at Blook Acres from behind a corner in Waterfall.

If he was airing this chain of events live, his watchers might just think he's hiding, to which he'd whip out the buzzer noise and go *nu-uh-uh, my dear audience! You are close - I may appear to be hiding, but that's because... (insert drum roll here) ...this is a covert spy operation!* Yeah, that's it - and spies have to be sneaky, because that's how they do it on the surface!

Though anything involving Blooky is... well, a personal matter, so for obvious reasons, he's not going to have the luxury of a live audience here. Which is a shame - maybe that would encourage him to move out from behind this corner, if he was ever daring enough to show that side of him (he is not).

But time and the fact that revealing his existence would make for an explanation longer than his allotted two hours aside - surely Blooky won't recognize him as their cousin, would they? His fool's courage evaporates at the thought, at the glimpse he catches of his old empty house. Then not knowing the truth meant he could pull off his usual show, make the excuse

that he just wanted to surprise one of his fans with a visit, and he'd never have to own up to anything, if he wanted. Then knowing... he'd have to look Blooky in the eye and attempt to justify why he broke a promise that seemed so easy to keep.

The best part is, he has no Plan B at all for that outcome-

Blooky floats out of their house the same second he hides back behind the wall, and they're just... there. Headphones on. They make the same right turn as they always do, past his (old) house and towards the snail pens, and.

It's just another day for them. It's the first time he's seeing them in years. Almost nothing has changed - nostalgia shouldn't form so quickly, especially when he wanted out of that life for the longest time, and yet...

He... could talk to them, if he wanted to. Instead he rounds corners to get a better view of Blooky as they phase through fences, clean up the pens, change out the old snail food and watch the snails doing their thing, and not once do they notice him. Not once does he get them to.

They're busy, he tells himself, and it's an excuse so flimsy it would crumple if someone looked at it just the slightest wrong way. *This is more than what - what Maddy has done for them*, he tries again, and indeed, there is no sign of her near the farm, ghost or not - but something in him twists and tangles itself up in knots at the thought, so... no. That won't do either.

They're right there, and he's right here, and all there is between them is empty air and a broken promise and an apprehension so deep it might just make up every fiber of his being, and he - so he could just-

Mettaton checks the time.

Thirty minutes before his afternoon event.

Well, that's too bad then! He needs about half that time to travel to his venue, and the remaining half of it to prepare himself to arrive in style, so! He'll just... have to do this another day!

So maybe he speeds off with a concerning lack of hesitation, but well, he is Mettaton, and he is a very busy robot, so toodles!

(Though. It was nice to see them again, he thinks, as he turns to look back at them and the acres one more time. This is a step forward. Maybe he can do this again.. Maybe he can tell them the truth next time, if he is so willing.)

He doesn't do it again.

Maddy takes one look at the catgirl doll, and just like that, she's spellbound.

Which is, firstly, rude of it to do that to her. Why is something so gorgeous being kept down here with all the sciency-looking tools and boring stacks of paper? This is false advertisement, she did not come down here to be starstruck - and secondly. Second of all.

She is very much experiencing an Emotion™.

It is not anger or rage, which is quite inconvenient, since those are the two she knows best. Sadness? No! Not it. Out of the question. Joy? Getting warmer. What else is there, that's along the lines of joy?

Whatever the feeling is, it is certainly in that direction. Like it's taken normal delight and with it, transcended language.

(That's her.)

(That's another way to put it.)

So, of course, she nabs it without a second thought. It's been nice being the Mad Dummy, even if that time has overstayed its welcome, and besides - who says she can't still be Undyne's training dummy in this new form? Who even has the power to tell Maddy what she can or can't do, anyway?

Maddy gains her bearings to catpaw gloves and a cute body that already feels like it's her own - a far cry from the empty, battered dummy before her. Had it been like this with the dummy, when she first inhabited it so long ago? Maddy glances between her paws (*hers!*) and the mangled dummy on the floor, and - oh, what does it matter! It's her and this catgirl doll against the world, now, and she's not going to let anything keep her from this - not even the scientist who saw it fit to keep her dream body hidden away down here.

Speaking of. She now has to sneak herself out of the lab.

Once she figures out how to use her new paws - the mini-dummies were good for pressing buttons and the like, but some things unfortunately require more... delicate actions - Maddy shoves the old dummy in the spot her new body once was, and makes her break for the elevator.

(By break, we mean she attempts to power-walk to the exit, trips over herself one too many times, and promptly switches to floating to not deal with that.)

Then there's the matter of buttons. There are three of them, yes, and she doesn't exactly remember which floor she came down from, but why should that matter when she can just press all of them? The elevator may stop at every floor that way, but that just means it'll take her to the right one with enough waiting!

A horrible screeching sound as the doors close. The elevator descends, far too gently for it to be making any considerable progress, and then—

The elevator drops.

The doors open to the darkness, which is definitely not the level Maddy entered from.

Not a few seconds later, the doors snap shut and the elevator wastes no time shooting upwards, dislodging Maddy from where she'd been pancaked on the ceiling, and sending her back down to be pancaked on the floor.

The doors open to the lab ground floor. Which is, presumably, the right level.

Had Maddy already fused with her new body (she's not, a girl like her needs time for that kinda thing), that would've hurt way worse than cartoon physics makes it look - she peels herself off the ground and checks the body for scratches, and finds... barely any! The elevator is safe from her rightful revenge, in that case - Maddy still does have to make her great escape, and as satisfying as giving the elevator a good smacking-around would be, it wouldn't do much to get her and the catgirl doll out of there.

The exit is in sight. Maddy very nearly makes it across the straight line of the hallway to freedom, before - her cat ears twitch. The distant humming of some cutesy tune grows a little louder. She throws herself back towards the wall, kicks a random bag of dog food out of the way, and presses up against the fridge as a yellow lizard monster in a white coat pops up from out of nowhere, fiddling with something in her hands.

(Isn't she that same lizard monster Maddy keeps seeing, hanging out with her Undyne? Alphys? Was that her name? But damn, she lives like this?)

Ears sure are useful for detecting things like that whilst looking cute about it, but point aside - she's stuck. While Alphys is idling in front of some

large screen, Maddy very well can't pull off a stealth mission to escape, can she? Both exits are in Alphys's line of sight, and what can she do about it? Wait? But no one did ever say she had to be completely stealthy, and Maddy should be just as capable of doing a hit-and-run in this new body as she was in the dummy, so she—

“Right here! I'm right here, mew!”

Hey wait *why is that coming from her*. Maddy drops to the floor and throws a hand over her mouth, and when the accursed voice line strikes again, she throws her other hand over the body's voicebox and shoots a glare around the corner. Alphys taps a button on the thing in her hands - a game controller of sorts - and every time she does it, the same insipid voiceline comes calling, broadcasting her location to the world.

The footsteps become louder and louder. Maddy's voicebox yells over and over again - she's right here! She's right here, mew~!

Well. This isn't a stealth mission anymore, now is it. Hit-and-run plan is a go, then - Maddy shoots back up, just as Alphys rounds the corner to find her, and—

“I'M RIGHT HERE, MEW!”

Alphys faints on the spot.

Huh. Guess she doesn't have to do hit-and-run after all.

As soon as she's far, far away from Alphys and her lab, Maddy nearly collapses on the ground in sheer relief. She's got it! This gnarly, groovy little catgirl body is hers! Hers! All hers!! Once she fuses with it, her pink little ghost of a cousin is going to be so jealous - maybe then he'll find it in himself to get out there and chase his own dreams! She'll look after Blooky and the snail farm while he's off, and she'll just shift her hours of being Undyne's training dummy to part-time, and...

Speaking of.

Maddy looks both ways before sneaking into Blook Acres, and quickly discovers there was no need - no one's there. The snails are living out their snaily lives in relative (boring) peace, and Blooks must be off-duty at the moment, but for the longest time she's never seen...

No, no, it's fine! It's fine. Maddy barely stops short of yanking his door open by the hinges - he's just. Well. Not around whenever she comes by, she

supposes. Or he needs his space. He wouldn't leave Blooky's side so easily - (not like her) - and besides. She does have to actually fuse with the catgirl doll before she can show anybody, anyway.

Well, ain't nothing to do but to find a secluded spot and wait. Time's a wasting.

Napstablook has the timing of Mettaton's shows down to the second, now. Their television is on the exact moment the intro begins, so that must be one of those few things they're good at, they suppose. Always being on time for the premiere.

Of course they are. It's their favorite show. They wouldn't miss this for the world.

Though they don't expect this episode to play out the way it does - silent. Ominous. A close-up of Mettaton waiting in the wings - no, wait, that part's expected. Every episode always has at least three shots of him, right up close. Really, is it even a Mettaton show if there isn't Mettaton himself on full display?

And then he starts speaking, commands all the attention in the world with his voice alone, and the plot truly starts. Napstablook draws closer to the screen - on second look, Mettaton is not alone in this episode. The human who's been with him for the last few, the same one who liked their little top hat trick and laid with them on the floor feeling like garbage, stands against him once again, and this time they've traded out their cooking apron for a dandy cowboy hat. Still a little silly. Still the same determined expression.

The air's tense as Mettaton unspools the goings-on behind the scenes. How he knows the good scientist's ultimate scheme inside and out. How he never intended for the human to come to harm, even if he played up his role as the killer robot. How he's yet to draw his trump cards—

—and then the doors lock. The lights flare. The stage is set.

“SORRY, FOLKS! THE OLD PROGRAM'S BEEN CANCELED!!! BUT WE'VE GOT A FINALE THAT WILL DRIVE YOU WILD!!!”

Wait. They freeze. *Finale?* Were they supposed to expect a—

“REAL DRAMA!! REAL ACTION!! REAL BLOODSHED!! ON OUR NEW SHOW... “ATTACK OF THE KILLER ROBOT!””

Mettaton charges at the human, and Napstablook is - they're not ready for this. Was there an announcement they missed, in the last few episodes? There's probably a show schedule up somewhere on the Undernet, but they've never looked at it; did that say anything? Were they supposed to know this?

It's too late, now. All they can do is watch.

Mettaton proves himself truly invulnerable, so much so that the human's little soul pellets ricochet off him and don't leave so much as a scratch. Beyond that, the human can only do so much to fend off the steadily growing wave of Mini-tons surrounding them at every angle; they get a scratch here. A nick there.

It gives them an odd little relief, that Mettaton can't be hurt, but even so the situation doesn't sit right with them. Who do they want to come out on top? Do they want to see either one of them win? Mettaton's charm and dramatic flair is delightful, and comfortingly familiar, yet they've met the human. They've witnessed their kindness firsthand, and that's a rare thing to come across these days. So...

The human's little phone rings, and there's a sudden lull in the tension. Mettaton has prepared more Mini-tons, the small bots waiting in the wings, but he hasn't commanded them to strike. Not yet. Is he giving the human a chance? Or drawing out the suspense?

The human points to something in the distance. Mettaton turns to look at it.

A switch clicks into place.

(When the light fades and Mettaton EX emerges, a dazzling, radiant star all but intent to shoot up to the surface, Napstablook is reminded of a little something in the long-lost past:

There were four of them, then. Someone had asked what else they would do, if they could choose a life away from the snail farm; they don't remember who said it. It could have been themselves, for all they know.

Maddy, predictably, wanted a life where she could throw hands. A cousin they haven't seen since then didn't know what they would do, but thought writing poems would be nice. Napstablook herself never really thought about it, and even now they don't know if they can answer this; the

snail farm is their life. They can't imagine a future without that part of them - but mixing music has always been their thing, too. They wanted a life with both.

And ~~Happy?~~ He had the biggest dreams of them all: to perform. Not just for the monsters, but for the humans on the surface, too - he'd pointed out the lead of a human movie they'd watched, not too long ago, and said: *you see him? That's me. That's going to be me, someday.*)

Mettaton poses. Prances around the stage with new legs, high-heeled and pointy, with each strike at the human a graceful dance. Assails them with Mini-tons, bombs, an impromptu essay, himself, and even his own heart, flying out of him in a blinding show of lightning. All the while, they're transfixed. Maybe the whole audience is - it's a wonder the human hasn't been stunned speechless, as they dodge and pose to the beat of Mettaton's groove.

Even though they're not at the scene itself, the atmosphere becomes electric. Pure excitement. It's just them and Mettaton and the human, them gasping every time the human takes a hit or when Mettaton does, directly to his electric heart, as his arms and his legs fall off, one after the other. Trepidation roiling in their metaphorical gut when Mettaton stops dancing, sits on the floor with his limbs in shambles, and still he fights back. Still the human dodges, until...

"OOH, LOOK AT THESE RATINGS!!! THIS IS THE MOST VIEWERS I'VE EVER HAD!!!" When the camera zooms in close, they're almost jolted out of the moment - even with the harsh lighting, they can see the stars in his eye. See how he lights up even when he's in pieces on the ground, like even that can't stop him from shining.

(Feels like forever, since they've seen that smile. Feels like someone they've known.)

"WE'VE REACHED THE VIEWER CALL-IN MILESTONE! ONE LUCKY VIEWER WILL HAVE THE CHANCE TO TALK TO ME... BEFORE I LEAVE THE UNDERGROUND FOREVER!"

And - so - what he said about a finale. About how this, too, is going to end. Napstablook has had their phone close by since the episode's beginning, and they couldn't have been more relieved - they couldn't have been more *terrified*. Dialing the number on-screen is a shaky, hasty task, and once they're done, the ringing sends tremors through the whole house.

There's people who could've been faster. More deserving of this chance. But they have to try - it's the only shot they've got to talk to him. They know

what to say. They don't know how to say it—

“HI, YOU'RE ON TV! WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY ON THIS, OUR LAST SHOW???”

It's now or never.

“oh..... hi... mettaton...” they start, and in this one moment, the whole world has stopped. “i really liked watching your show... my life is pretty boring, but... seeing you on the screen... brought excitement to my life... vicariously”

“i can't tell, but... i guess this is the last episode...?” After this, they're not going to have that anymore, are they? It gets all the more difficult to not sound like they're crying on live television, but they hold back a sob. For him. “i'll miss you... mettaton...”

“oh... i didn't mean to talk so long... oh.....”

Napstablook fumbles at hanging up for a moment, and once they do - they let the phone drop to the floor. Lie down alongside it. Pay no attention to the screen. Let the emotional whirlwind blow them away.

All has been said and done. They've had their moment. It's up. So why are they thinking of the many other ways that could've gone, and the things they could've said? Mettaton reminds them, in so many small ways, of their missing cousin, and with him around, the absence had started to hurt less. What happened, all that time ago? Why did he disappear? What did they do to make him leave?

Did ~~Happy~~ ever find the way to his dreams?

But that's too long and sad to spill on live television. Mettaton's all about the exciting and the new, and of course he wouldn't want all that rambling on his last show...

...it's. The finale. It's real. The curtains will close and they're not going to see him again. Mettaton will be off to... wherever he's going, and their life will go back to the way it was: being boring and wholly monotonous and always missing someone there, and.....

"PERHAPS... IT MIGHT BE BETTER IF I STAY HERE A WHILE," Mettaton says, out of the blue, and their whole world stops once more. "HUMANS ALREADY HAVE STARS AND IDOLS, BUT MONSTERS... THEY ONLY HAVE ME. IF I LEFT... THE UNDERGROUND WOULD LOSE ITS SPARK. I'D LEAVE AN ACHING VOID THAT COULD NEVER BE FILLED. SO..."

Mettaton looks at the camera, exhausted and broken but smiling, and for a second they almost think he's looking at them.

"...I THINK I'LL HAVE TO DELAY MY BIG DEBUT."

He's staying. He's *staying*. Just for all of them? He would - he would do that? The tears start flowing again, drown out the old stains with a fresh wave, but they're not sad. It's not all sad, that is. Even so, they hang on to every word he says next - that the human has proven themselves to be strong enough. That Mettaton is going to run out of battery power, in a few moments' time, but he'll be alright. They'll all be alright.

"KNOCK 'EM DEAD, DARLING. AND EVERYONE... THANK YOU. YOU'VE BEEN A GREAT AUDIENCE!"

With that, the episode ends, and the credits roll. The quiet slowly settles again, in the ghost house in Waterfall.

And Napstablook sinks to the floor with a smile.

Their cousins left long ago, one to find her destiny, one to find their place in the world, and one off to who knows where - but against all reason, no one else is leaving. The few people they still have in their life have decided to stay, and maybe those people don't know it, but - that means more to them than they can say. It means the world.

There is an absence, here, by their side. It's starting to hurt less, day by day.

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